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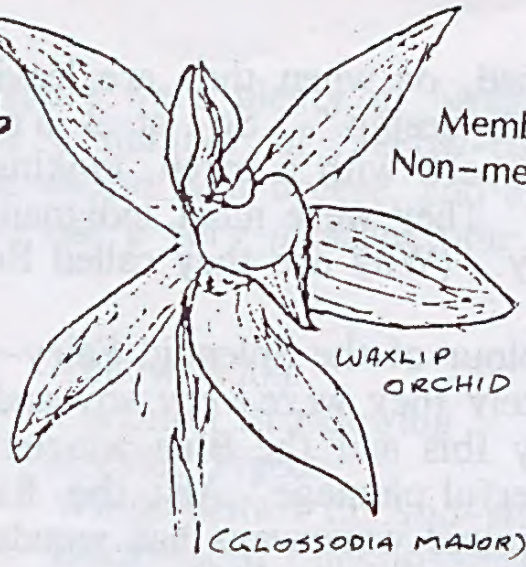

October '97

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Birding, to Darwin and Back

Birdwatching is a disease well worth catching. Brian and I spent seven weeks away on holiday. We travelled 11000 km to Darwin and back, and our trip was enriched by observing the different bird life as we travelled along. Very few days passed without our being able to add another different species to the list. Our list of positively identified species reached over 140, and there were many more we weren't sure about. The most frequently observed birds were Magpie Larks, Willie Wagtails and Galahs.

The further north we went the greater were the numbers of Fork-tailed Kites. They were cleaning up the dead animals on the edges of the roads, and they were in great numbers in the parks. We were warned not to feed them as the could become quite cheeky and would steal food from your picnic table if you didn't watch out!

Many stops were made to watch Wedgetailed Eagles, or try to get some good video of them. The power they exuded as they ripped into a 'roo carcass, and their tremendous wing span as they rose and circled around, never ceased to amaze us.

Huge flocks of Budgerigars, Zebra Finches, and Cockatiels were lovely to see wheeling around over the vegetation. It made me feel for their poor caged cousins.

In Katherine River Gorge we sat and watched a Great Bowerbird at his bower, collecting, decorating and moving his possessions around and admiring them. On another day we watched the courting display.

At the Caravan Park in Darwin on the first morning we were woken by what sounded like a rather nasty domestic row! After several mornings of repeat performances I asked the park owner what it was. "Get up early and have a look. It is a Bush Curlew. They come into the park at night to eat the crickets, and they make that sound when they

are disturbed, or when they are leaving early in the morning. They're really worth seeing." So, at 3 o'clock next morning I was running around the park with a torch, looking at brown, long legged birds with large eyes. They were most indignant and let me know with their most unusual cry. (Why are they called Bush Thick-knees now?)*

The colour of the Splendid Fairy-wren has to be seen to be believed. Unfortunately they were very shy and we only managed to glimpse two. The Glossy Ibis and the Blue-winged Kookaburra were two other birds with wonderful plumage. Also the Rainbow Bee-eaters, which were very plentiful around waterways had wonderful, brilliant plumage.

We had a boat trip on a billabong on the Reynolds River at Well Tree Station. I have never seen so many water birds at one time in all my life. There were thousands of birds - egrets, spoonbills, Magpie Geese, ibis and herons, Nankeen Night-herons, Jabiru, Whistle Duck, Burdiken Duck, cormorants, Jacana, terns, Darters, etc. It was a bird watchers paradise. Unfortunately there were also Fresh- and Salt-water Crocodiles sunning themselves on the banks. Many of our fellow travellers were far more interested in them - but that is another story.

A lasting memory of this trip will be the melodious call of the Pied Butcher Birds in the morning - my favourite bird call.

Margaret Willis

* You might be pleased to learn the 'powers-that-be' decided a while back to revert to the name 'Stone-curlew' instead of 'Thick-knee' which was a quite unkind reference to their knobbly knees. Ed.

The Outing That Wasn't

(But the one that was was great!)

Maureen and Ken had visited the Mt. Franklin/Hepburn area during the week before the outing, and weren't very happy with the scarcety of both flowers and birds, and suggested that perhaps their usual haunts in the Muckleford forest might make a more interesting ous ting. The rest of us agreed, and so we set off, first for the Gower school, then the Quince tree, and finished at the Red, White and Blue mine, stopping on the way to explore a little. After I left the others had made their way out via the Oliaria patch.

The season and flowering was more like the end of August instead of the middle of September. The rains might stimulate next season's flowering, but this year compatitively little seems to be coming on. The Golden Wattle had been good but it was begining to fade and the Rough Wattle had taken over, while Gold Dust Wattle was just beginning to flower. There were a few Dwarf and Nodding Greenhoods and one nice

clump of Leopard Orchids seen. There were plenty of birds - mostly Fuscous Honeyeaters, though quite a number of Yellow-tufted were seen, too. The afternoon was idyllic with a faint breeze, and light cloud, and despite the dearth of flowers we had a very pleasant time.

Bird list for the outing

Galah
Eastern Rosella
Crimson Rosella
Red-rumped Parrot
Spotted Pardalote (h)
Striated Pardalote (h)
Fuscous,
Yellow-faced,
White-plumed,
White-eared,
Brown-headed and
Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters
Red Wattlebird
Fantail Cuckoo
Olive-backed Oriole (h)
White-browed Babbler
Grey Currawong
Little Raven
Australian Raven
Magpie
Magpie Lark
White-winged Chough
Willie Wagtail
Restless Flycatcher
Pacific Heron
Red-browed Firetail
Diamond Firetail
Brown Treecreeper
White-throated Treecreeper (h)
Grey Shrike-thrush
Blackbird
Superb Blue Wren
Brown Thornbill
Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Yellow Robin
Common Bronzewing
Crested Pigeon
White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Dusky Woodswallow
Welcome Swallow
Masked Lapwing
Black Duck
Total - 43 species

Plants in flower -

Nodding Greenhood
Dwarf Greenhood
Tall Greenhood
Pink Fingers
Blue Caledenia
Leopard Orchid
Gold Dust Wattle
Golden Wattle
Rough Wattle
Ploughshare Wattle
Silver Wattle
Yellow Stars
Austral Bears Ears
Early Nancy
Wood Sorrel
Common Hovea
Cats Claws (Grevillea alpina)
Billy Buttons
Riceflower (Pimelea linifolia)
Sticky Boronia
Cypress Daisy-bush
Scented Sundew
Tall Sundew

Rita Mills

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Welcome to new members, Grace McGaughy and family.

Learning Activities

A personal view of the activities of the Mount Alexander Conservation Advisory Board

Following the Council's formal launch of the Environmental Action Plan early in 1997, it seemed reasonable for the advisory board to slow activities until the new elected Council was in place and had "found it's feet". It was believed that there was a core of new councillors who where aware of the support they had had by environmentally concious voters, and who were informed about the Board's efforts. It seemed that little could be done until the accounting system had been examined and rearranged so there was a clear understanding ot the Shire's committments (which could not be altered) and the remaining funds available for distribution.

In the meantime, the Board wrote a major submission for Natural Heritage Trust Funding for implemntation of the Action Plan, in which the employment of an Environmental Officer was stated as being crucial to its success. It also responded to the Shire's Planning Scheme. In a formal Board meeting, request was again made for some written direction on the bounds for the operation of the Board which is a Section 86 Committee of the Council, and for specific direction for the Board's future activities. As two community members had moved off the Board because of personal committments early in the year, the addition of new members was requested, both to vitalise the current Board and to spread the workload. In a meeting with four Councillors in mid July, the Board was requested to submit its "top three" actions for consideration for "environmental" funding in the draft budget, given that both funding and Environmental Officer was not possible because of the tight financial situation. Board members believed very strongly that any successful, planned, coordinated and monitored implementation of the Action Plan required a staff officer, preferably full time, and again urged Councillors to examine creatively ways and means of moving towards this goal. A list of a variety of actions which could be considered for funding in the August budget was later submitted.

The draft budget was greeted with dismay and disbelief. The Board wrote expressing its confusion and concerns over the Council's attitude towards the implementation of the Action Plan given the statements in the Shire's Corporate Plan, etc. A meeting was requested over the issue of the total non-funding. Board meeting notes, which are submitted to Council, included the additional concern that because there is no staff member to liaise with the Advisory Board, therefore environmental issues are passed over when allocation decisions are made. Another concern was that the communication with Council had been inadequate. Block resignation by all members was seriously discussed.

Informal discussions with individual councillors led Board members to believe that some councillors were totally unfamiliar with the Action Plan document and the community input which led to the establishment of the Board and the content of the Action Plan.. They saw the Board as a marginalised lobby group and perhaps that it was a "Commissioners'" Action plan. One councillor was amazed at the Board members' reaction because he *had not recieved any personal phone calls during the preparation of the draft budget "lobbying" funding for the implemntation!* On reflection it seemed that the Board Members were politically naive. Board members went into damage control. In the following week one previously very active board member resigned. It is clear that the councillors were putting effort into the Tourism and Heritage advisory areas before the Environment was dealt with. The Conservation Advisory Board felt neglected and perhaps rejected.

The remaining four Board members, senior Shire staff and a majority of Councillors met on Aug 22 and there was a restatement that there would be no funding for a staff Environmental Officer/Implementation for the present. All parties agreed that the Board is not fully aware of the "many"(?) current on-going Shire works which fit the Action Plan. The Board maintains that it is impossibe for them to have this knowledge while there is no staff member with responsibilitry to inform and liaise.

It became obvious that there had been positive, encouraging, very recent activity prior to this meeting. For example, two Councillors and the Technical Operations Manager, John Keogh, had spent a day with Ballarat Council exploring the way they deal with such matters ($45 million budget, 1-2 dedicated Environmental Officers). Councillor Carthew had taken the Action Plan recommendations a step further and drafted and circulated an Action Plan Summary, reorganised under the headings of *Promotions, Project, Information, Operations and Policy Strategies.* Board members agreed to review this Summary in preparation for a joint workshop on Sept 4 to prepare the "next stage" - a brief, reduced number, user friendly recommendation list to facilitate staff and councillor use. It was agreed to appoint new members to the Board immediatly from existing contacts so that the "next stage" task is done quickly and efficiently. The Board will be then be disolved and formally reconstituted. Formal Guidelines for the Board's operations were (again) promised.

Some items in the current Council budget are monies allocated to projects where submissions for joint funding from other bodies has been made,. If these submissions are unsuccessful, the Council-allocated money would be "freed" for other purposes - perhaps other environmental activities.

Board Members left the meeting re-enthused and cautiously hopeful. Many thanks to the Field Nats club and individual members who have backed me.

Marg Hunter. Aug. 29

Birds of Bowden St.

These are the birds I have seen in four months of inattention at Bowden Street. (Can't be too bad a bird spot. Ed.)

Maned Duck
Masked Lapwing (overhead)
Galah
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Crimson Rosella
Eastern Rosella
Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo
Kookaburra
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Blackbird
Grey Shrike-thrush
Restless Flycatcher
Grey Fantail
Wren
Red Wattlevird
Yellow-faced Honeyeater
White-plumed Honeyeater
Eastern Spinebill
Spotted Pardalote
Silvereye
Sparrow
Magpie
Australian Raven

Susanna Starr

Observations

* A Lewin's Rail seen by Ern and Leslie Perkins on the Redesdale-Heathcote Road on Sept 9.
* Barbara Maund was surprised to see a pair of Red-rumped Parrots waddling down her garden path in Kennedy Street.
* Also, when she was sitting in a car waiting for a friend she was amazed to see a Magpie dive-bomb a Motorcyclist repeatedly from Victory Park corner to the Post Office. The bird did not seem bothered by other cyclists or pedestrians.
* Maggie Oliver reported seeing three Brolgas between Beaufort and Skipton.

* Margaret Willis reports Crimson Rosellas in her buddleia, seemingly after the pollen, but pulling the flower heads off and dropping them on the ground and generally making an awful mess.
* Margaret Badminton had an Echidna at her place at Yapeen for a couple of days. Also, a pair of Galahs have eggs in a shallow hollow in a Grey Box nearby. Last year a Kookaburra took the eggs, so hopefully the parents will be able to raise this clutch.
* A Golden Bronze-cuckoo has been seen again in the Oak tree at Broadways this year. George tells us that it arrives about the same time each year. He also reported a Pallid Cuckoo calling in the vicinity of the Senior Campus of the Secondary College.
* Several people reported seeing the pair of Boobooks in the Gardens.
* Brenda Envall is having Red Wattlebird problems. They are chasing all of the small birds from her area.
* Penny Garnett has sent lists of plants flowering on the first two Spring walks. 18/9, area south of Preshaw Street - Acacia aspera (Rough Wattle), A. diffusa (Spreading Wattle), A. paradoxa (Hedge Wattle), Pimilea linifolia (Slender Rice Flower), Craspedia glauca (Billy Buttons).
25/9 Wattle Flat behind the Pony Club - Grevillea alpina (Downy Grevillea), Brachteantha viscosa (Sticky Everlasting), Ozothammus obcordatum (Grey Everlasting), Podolepis jaciodes (Showy Podelepis), Microceris scapigera (Yam Daisy), Glossodia major (Wax-lip Orchid), Pterostylus nutans (Nodding Greenhood), Diurus pardina (Leopard Orchid), Dianella revoluta (Black-anther Flax-lily), Hibbertia exutiaces (Tangled Guineaflower).
Both locations - Acacia pycnantha (Golden Wattle), A. acinacea (Gold-dust Wattle), Davisia ulicifolia (Gorse Bitter Pea), Eriostemon verrucosus (Bendigo, or Fairy, Wax Flower), Caladenia carnea (Pink Fingers), Tetratheca ciliata (Pink Bells), Cassinia arcuata (Drooping cassinia), Hakea decurrens (Silky Hakea, Bushy Needlewood), Rhytidospermum procumbens (Sweet Marianth), Hardenbergia violacea (Sarsparilla), Wurmbia dioica (Early Nancy).

From the Business Meeting

A catalogue of books from Bloomings Books has been sent to the Club and is available for your perusal. Bloomings are wholesalers and distributers of books on botany, horticulture, natural history and conservation. Some titles include 'Aboriginal Environmental Impacts' by James Kohen, 'The Banksia Book' by Alex George, 'Biodiversity in Mediteranian Ecosystems' by R Hobbs, 'Native Trees and Shrubs of SE Australia' by Leon Costermans, 'Attracting Frogs to Your Garden' by Kevin Casey, various bird Field Guides and much, much more.

The idea behind the offer is that they will supply the Club and it can sell the books at retail price and gain funds for the Club. Interested?

Another commercial offer has come from the Casterton Motel and Aussie's 4x4 Tours. They are offering a chance to see the wildflowers and birds of the Casterton area as a compiled package suitable for small groups, minimum 5 and maximum 10. The

information is on the table.

A conference titled 'Victorias National Parks, the Next Century' is to be held on the evening of Fri Oct 25, and all day Saturday Oct 25 at the University of Melbourne, Old Pathology Theatre, Swanson St, Parkville, 3052. Sunday will have optional activities focussed on the 'forgotten areas' - either Heathcote Box and Ironbark woodlands or native grasslands of the Merri Creek catchment.
Information pamphlet and registration form is on the table.

Invitation to Register for Campout
The Ringwood Field Natualists and the Upper Goulburn Field Naturalists Clubs are jointly running the annual campout for 1988 for the Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association.

Venue	'Elkanah' Guesthouse, Buxton Road Marysville. (Approx. 2km north of the town).
Dates	Friday March 6 to Monday March 9.
Catering	All meals provided from dinner, Fri evening to lunch Monday. Tea and Coffee facilities are available.
Accommodation	Bedrooms accommodate 2,3,or 4 in beds or bunks. Electric blankets, blankets and pillows provided, but bed linen and towels required Alternatively, there are motels and other guesthouses in Marysville and a caravan park nearby. See RACV accommodation guides
Cost	The anticipated costs will be - Registration and insurance - $ 22 Accom. 6 - 9 March - $110 - total $132.00 For those not chosing 'Elkanah', meals are available - Packed lunches - $ 8.50 Dinner - $15
Environment	Maysville is in the central highlands of Victoria, within easy reach of a wide range of different habitats, inc. forests, mountains, lakes and high country.
Facilities	All facilities inc. petrol are available in Marysville.
Excursions	Proposed excursions include some with a geological, botanical and ornithological bias, to Lake Mountain, Keppels Falls, Keppels Lookout, various tracks around Marysville, Lady Talbot Drive, Snobs Creek Trout Hatchery, McKenzie Reserve, Fraser National Park, Cambarville and Cathedral Range. Self guided excursions will also be arranged. Suggestions for excursions and offers to lead an excursion would be welcomed. (see under 'Enquiries' below).
Bookings	Bookings are now being accepted. A booking fee of $30 per person,will secure a place at 'Elkanah' ($22 otherwise). Further information on the campout will be sent later in the year to Clubs and to all who register.
Payments	Cheques should be made payable to 'VFNCA' and sent to - Geoff Travers Treasurer, Campout Committee 23/2 old Stud Rd. Wantirna South. Vic. 3152
Enquiries & suggestions	Please direct all enquiries, suggestions and offers to - Judith Cook - 6 Parkhill Drive, Ringwood 3134 Ph 03 9870 8739 or Lorraine Pyke - 149 Crystal Creek Rd., Alexandra 3714 Ph 0357 721 189

C . F . N . C . PROGRAMME

N.B. Excursions leave promptly at times stated.
General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church Hall. The entrance to car park is behind the Art Gallery, Lyttleton Street.

Thurs Oct 2. Spring walk. Leader John Turnbull. Leave 27 Doveton St at 4pm.
Thurs Oct 9 Spring Walk. Leader is Stewart Morris. Arrangements as above.
Fri Oct 10 **Plants of the Ballarat District**, Pat and Bill Murphy, Ballarat F.N.C. 8pm, UCA hall.
Sun Oct 12 **Mt Beckwith.** All day excursion. Leaders Pat and Bill Murphy of Ballarat FNC. Meet at Clunes P.O. at 11am. Take lunch, etc. If you want to have morning tea in Clunes be sure to arrive well before 11am.
Wed Oct 15 **Working Bee. Cape Broom Pull.** Meet at 9 am at the corner of Mary St. and Froomes Rd. Bring thick protective gloves.
Thurs Oct 16 Spring Walk. Leader is Athol Dorman. Arrangements as for Oct 2.
Thurs Ocr 23 Spring Walk. Leader is George Broadway. Arrangements as for Oct 2.
Fri Nov 14 **"In the steps of Baron Von Mueller** – The North Australian Exploring Expedition", Marco Duretto, speaker. UCA hall. 8pm.
Sat Nov 15. **Mount Moliagul.** Leave outside 27 Doveton St. at **11am.** Take lunch and afternoon tea.
Sat Nov 6. **Dawn Breakfast.** Meet outside 15 Gaulton St. at **5.30am.** Bring binocs and breakfast.
Fri Dec 12. **Members and visitors night.** Start thinking about what you might be able to contribute to the program for our last meeting for the year.
Sat Dec 13 **Tullaroop Reservoir.** Time to be decided at Dec. Meeting.
Fri Mar 6 – Mon Mar 9 1998 – **VFNCA campout at Marysville.** Details P 7.

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Meetings:-
General – Second Friday every month (except Jan) at **Uniting Church hall, Mostyn St.** at 8.00pm.
Business – Held on the 4th Thursday every month (except Dec.) at 38 Campbell Street at 7.30pm. **All Members are invited to attend.**

Subscriptions 1997 – Ordinary Membership: Single $16 Family $24
Pensioner/Student: Single $12 Family $18. Supporting $25
Newsletter posted: Membership + $6

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Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club Inc.
P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.